

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

ALBERTO JOSE DEL MURO,  
BOP #40467-198,

Plaintiff,

vs.

FERNANDO A. ARRIOLA, et al.,

Defendants.

Civil No. 09-2571 JM (WMC)

**ORDER:**

**(1) GRANTING MOTIONS TO PROCEED IN FORMA PAUPERIS, IMPOSING NO INITIAL PARTIAL FILING FEE AND GARNISHING BALANCE FROM PRISONER'S TRUST ACCOUNT [Doc. Nos. 2, 4]; AND**

**(2) SUA SPONTE DISMISSING FIRST AMENDED COMPLAINT FOR FAILING TO STATE A CLAIM PURSUANT TO 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) & 1915A(b)**

Plaintiff, Alberto Jose De Muro Guerrero, an inmate currently incarcerated at the Metropolitan Correctional Center ("MCC") located in San Diego, California and proceeding pro se, has filed a civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Before the Court could conduct the required sua sponte screening pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) & 1915A(b), Plaintiff filed a First Amended Complaint ("FAC") which is now the operative pleading. In addition, Plaintiff filed two Motions to Proceed *In Forma Pauperis* ("IFP") pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) [Doc. No. 2, 4].

1           **I. Motions to Proceed IFP [Doc. Nos. 2, 4]**

2           All parties instituting any civil action, suit or proceeding in a district court of the United States,  
 3 except an application for writ of habeas corpus, must pay a filing fee of \$350. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1914(a).  
 4 An action may proceed despite a party's failure to prepay the entire fee only if the party is granted leave  
 5 to proceed IFP pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a). *See Rodriguez v. Cook*, 169 F.3d 1176, 1177 (9th Cir.  
 6 1999). Prisoners granted leave to proceed IFP however, remain obligated to pay the entire fee in  
 7 installments, regardless of whether the action is ultimately dismissed for any reason. *See* 28 U.S.C. §  
 8 1915(b)(1) & (2).

9           Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915, as amended by the Prison Litigation Reform Act ("PLRA"), a prisoner  
 10 seeking leave to proceed IFP must submit a "certified copy of the trust fund account statement (or  
 11 institutional equivalent) for the prisoner for the six-month period immediately preceding the filing of  
 12 the complaint." 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(2). From the certified trust account statement, the Court must  
 13 assess an initial payment of 20% of (a) the average monthly deposits in the account for the past six  
 14 months, or (b) the average monthly balance in the account for the past six months, whichever is  
 15 greater, unless the prisoner has no assets. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1); 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(4). That  
 16 institution having custody of the prisoner must collect subsequent payments, assessed at 20% of the  
 17 preceding month's income, in any month  
 18 in which the prisoner's account exceeds \$10, and forward those payments to the Court until the entire  
 19 filing fee is paid. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2).

20           The Court finds that Plaintiff has submitted an affidavit which complies with 28 U.S.C.  
 21 § 1915(a)(1), and that he has attached a certified copy of his trust account statement pursuant to 28  
 22 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(2) and S.D. CAL. CIVLR 3.2. Plaintiff's trust account statement shows that he has  
 23 insufficient funds from which to pay filing fees at this time. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(4) (providing that  
 24 "[i]n no event shall a prisoner be prohibited from bringing a civil action or appealing a civil action or  
 25 criminal judgment for the reason that the prisoner has no assets and no means by which to pay the initial  
 26 partial filing fee."); *Taylor*, 281 F.3d at 850 (finding that 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(4) acts as a "safety-valve"  
 27 preventing dismissal of a prisoner's IFP case based solely on a "failure to pay . . . due to the lack of  
 28 funds available to him when payment is ordered."). Therefore, the Court **GRANTS** Plaintiff's Motions

1 to Proceed IFP [Doc. Nos. 2, 4] and assesses no initial partial filing fee per 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1).  
 2 However, the entire \$350 balance of the filing fees mandated shall be collected and forwarded to the  
 3 Clerk of the Court pursuant to the installment payment provisions set forth in 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1).

4 **II. Sua Sponte Screening per 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) and § 1915A**

5 **A. Standard**

6 The PLRA also obligates the Court to review complaints filed by all persons proceeding IFP and  
 7 by those, like Plaintiff, who are “incarcerated or detained in any facility [and] accused of, sentenced  
 8 for, or adjudicated delinquent for, violations of criminal law or the terms or conditions of parole,  
 9 probation, pretrial release, or diversionary program,” “as soon as practicable after docketing.” *See* 28  
 10 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b). Under these provisions, the Court must sua sponte dismiss any IFP  
 11 or prisoner complaint, or any portion thereof, which is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim, or  
 12 which seeks damages from defendants who are immune. *See* 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A;  
 13 *Lopez v. Smith*, 203 F.3d 1122, 1126-27 (9th Cir. 2000) (en banc) (§ 1915(e)(2)); *Resnick v. Hayes*, 213  
 14 F.3d 443, 446 (9th Cir. 2000) (§ 1915A).

15 Before amendment by the PLRA, the former 28 U.S.C. § 1915(d) permitted sua sponte dismissal  
 16 of only frivolous and malicious claims. *Lopez*, 203 F.3d at 1126, 1130. An action is frivolous if it lacks  
 17 an arguable basis in either law or fact. *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324 (1989). However 28  
 18 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A now mandate that the court reviewing an IFP or prisoner’s suit make  
 19 and rule on its own motion to dismiss before effecting service of the Complaint by the U.S. Marshal  
 20 pursuant to FED.R.CIV.P. 4(c)(2). *Id.* at 1127 (“[S]ection 1915(e) not only permits, but requires a district  
 21 court to dismiss an in forma pauperis complaint that fails to state a claim.”); *see also Barren v.*  
*Harrington*, 152 F.3d 1193, 1194 (9th Cir. 1998) (discussing 28 U.S.C. § 1915A).

23 “[W]hen determining whether a complaint states a claim, a court must accept as true all  
 24 allegations of material fact and must construe those facts in the light most favorable to the plaintiff.”  
 25 *Resnick*, 213 F.3d at 447; *Barren*, 152 F.3d at 1194 (noting that § 1915(e)(2) “parallels the language of  
 26 Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6)”). In addition, the Court’s duty to liberally construe a pro se’s  
 27 pleadings, *see Karim-Panahi v. Los Angeles Police Dept.*, 839 F.2d 621, 623 (9th Cir. 1988), is  
 28 “particularly important in civil rights cases.” *Ferdik v. Bonzelet*, 963 F.2d 1258, 1261 (9th Cir. 1992).

1                   **B.       Bivens Action**

2                   While Plaintiff filed this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, he names only Federal actors as  
 3 Defendants. Accordingly, the Court will consider Plaintiff's claims to arise under *Bivens v. Six*  
 4 *Unknown Named Fed. Narcotics Agents*, 403 U.S. 388 (1971). *Bivens* established that "compensable  
 5 injury to a constitutionally protected interest [by federal officials alleged to have acted under color of  
 6 federal law] could be vindicated by a suit for damages invoking the general federal question jurisdiction  
 7 of the federal courts [pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331]." *Butz v. Economou*, 438 U.S. 478, 486 (1978).  
 8 "Actions under § 1983 and those under *Bivens* are identical save for the replacement of a state actor  
 9 under § 1983 by a federal actor under *Bivens*." *Van Strum v. Lawn*, 940 F.2d 406, 409 (9th Cir. 1991).

10                  *Bivens* provides that "federal courts have the inherent authority to award damages against federal  
 11 officials to compensate plaintiffs for violations of their constitutional rights." *Western Center for*  
 12 *Journalism v. Cederquist*, 235 F.3d 1153, 1156 (9th Cir. 2000). However, a *Bivens* action may only be  
 13 brought against the responsible federal official in his or her individual capacity. *Daly-Murphy v.*  
 14 *Winston*, 837 F.2d 348, 355 (9th Cir. 1988). *Bivens* does not authorize a suit against the government  
 15 or its agencies for monetary relief. *FDIC v. Meyer*, 510 U.S. 471, 486 (1994); *Thomas-Lazear v. FBI*,  
 16 851 F.2d 1202, 1207 (9th Cir. 1988); *Daly- Murphy*, 837 F.2d at 355.

17                   **C.       Eighth Amendment - Medical care claims**

18                  In his First Amended Complaint, Plaintiff claims that Defendants have violated his Eighth  
 19 Amendment rights by "ignoring [Plaintiff's] petition of nose surgery." (FAC at 2.) Plaintiff alleges that  
 20 he suffers from sleep apnea. (*Id.* at 4.)

21                  Where a prisoner's Eighth Amendment claim is one of inadequate medical care, the prisoner  
 22 must allege "acts or omissions sufficiently harmful to evidence deliberate indifference to serious  
 23 medical needs." *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976). Such a claim has two elements: "the  
 24 seriousness of the prisoner's medical need and the nature of the defendant's response to that need." *McGuckin v. Smith*, 974 F.2d 1050, 1059 (9th Cir. 1991), *overruled on other grounds by WMX Techs., Inc. v. Miller*, 104 F.3d 1133, 1136 (9th Cir. 1997). A medical need is serious "if the failure to treat the  
 25 prisoner's condition could result in further significant injury or the 'unnecessary and wanton infliction  
 26 of pain.'" *McGuckin*, 974 F.2d at 1059 (quoting *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 104). Indications of a serious  
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1 medical need include “the presence of a medical condition that significantly affects an individual’s daily  
 2 activities.” *Id.* at 1059-60. By establishing the existence of a serious medical need, a prisoner satisfies  
 3 the objective requirement for proving an Eighth Amendment violation. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S.  
 4 825, 834 (1994).

5 Even if Plaintiff has alleged facts sufficient to establish the existence of a serious medical need,  
 6 he must also allege that each Defendant’s response to his need was deliberately indifferent. *Farmer*,  
 7 511 U.S. at 834. In general, deliberate indifference may be shown when prison officials deny, delay,  
 8 or intentionally interfere with a prescribed course of medical treatment, or it may be shown by the way  
 9 in which prison medical officials provide necessary care. *Hutchinson v. United States*, 838 F.2d 390,  
 10 393-94 (9th Cir. 1988). Before it can be said that a prisoner’s civil rights have been abridged with  
 11 regard to medical care, however, “the indifference to his medical needs must be substantial. Mere  
 12 ‘indifference,’ ‘negligence,’ or ‘medical malpractice’ will not support this cause of action.” *Broughton*  
 13 *v. Cutter Laboratories*, 622 F.2d 458, 460 (9th Cir. 1980) (citing *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 105-06). See also  
 14 *Toguchi v. Chung*, 391 F.3d 1051, 1060 (9th Cir. 2004).

15 Plaintiff claims that an unidentified Doctor has indicated that he needs surgery for his medical  
 16 condition. (See FAC at 4.) However, the documents attached to Plaintiff’s First Amended Complaint  
 17 indicate that prison officials have given him medication and provided him with medical examinations.  
 18 (See FAC at 33, Response to Administrative Remedy No. 526805-A1). This document reflects that  
 19 prison officials and Plaintiff have a difference of opinion with regard to the course of treatment for his  
 20 medical condition. None of the documents attached to Plaintiff’s First Amended Complaint show any  
 21 documentation of a recommendation by a Doctor that Plaintiff requires surgery for his condition. A  
 22 mere difference of opinion between an inmate and prison medical personnel regarding appropriate  
 23 medical diagnosis and treatment are not enough to establish a deliberate indifference claim. *Sanchez*  
 24 *v. Vild*, 891 F.2d 240, 242 (9th Cir. 1989).

25 Accordingly, Plaintiff’s Eighth Amendment medical deliberate indifference claims are  
 26 **DISMISSED** for failing to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.

27 **D. Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Claims**

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1 Plaintiff alleges that he was discriminated against based on his race in violation of his right to  
 2 equal protection under the law. The “Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment commands  
 3 that no State shall ‘deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws,’ which  
 4 is essentially a direction that all persons similarly situated should be treated alike.” *City of Cleburne*  
 5 *v. Cleburne Living Center, Inc.* 473 U.S. 432, 439 (1985). In order to state a claim alleging violations  
 6 of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, Plaintiff must allege facts which  
 7 demonstrate that he is a member of a protected class. *See Harris v. McRae*, 448 U.S. 297, 323 (1980)  
 8 (indigents); *see also City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr.*, 473 U.S. 432, 440-41 (1985) (listing  
 9 suspect classes). In this matter, Plaintiff has sufficiently plead that he is a member of a suspect class  
 10 but he has failed to plead adequate facts to demonstrate that Defendants acted with an intent or purpose  
 11 to discriminate against him based upon his membership in a protected class. *See Barren v. Harrington*,  
 12 152 F.3d 1193, 1194 (9th Cir. 1998), *cert. denied*, 525 U.S. 1154 (1999). Here, Plaintiff only alleges  
 13 that he “feels” discriminated against because he is Hispanic but he does not allege any specific facts to  
 14 support this claim. Thus, the Court finds that Plaintiff’s allegations are insufficient to prove invidious  
 15 discriminatory intent. *Village of Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development Corp.*, 429  
 16 U.S. 252, 265 (1977).

17 Accordingly, the Court dismisses Plaintiff’s First Amended Complaint for failing to state a claim  
 18 upon which relief can be granted. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) & § 1915A. However, Plaintiff will be  
 19 permitted the opportunity to file an Amended Complaint.

### 20 III. CONCLUSION AND ORDER

21 Good cause appearing therefor, **IT IS HEREBY ORDERED** that:

22 1. Plaintiff’s Motions to proceed IFP pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) [Doc. Nos. 2, 4] are  
 23 **GRANTED**.

24 2. The Warden of the Metropolitan Correctional Center, or his designee, shall collect from  
 25 Plaintiff’s prison trust account the \$350 balance of the filing fee owed in this case by collecting monthly  
 26 payments from the account in an amount equal to twenty percent (20%) of the preceding month’s  
 27 income and forward payments to the Clerk of the Court each time the amount in the account exceeds  
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1 \$10 in accordance with 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2). ALL PAYMENTS SHALL BE CLEARLY  
2 IDENTIFIED BY THE NAME AND NUMBER ASSIGNED TO THIS ACTION.

3. The Clerk of the Court is directed to serve a copy of this Order on Warden, Metropolitan  
4 Correctional Center, 808 Union Street, San Diego, CA 92101.

5 **IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that:

6. Plaintiff's First Amended Complaint is **DISMISSED** without prejudice pursuant to 28  
7 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(b)and 1915A(b). However, Plaintiff is **GRANTED** forty five (45) days leave  
8 from the date this Order is "Filed" in which to file a Second Amended Complaint which cures all the  
9 deficiencies of pleading noted above. Plaintiff's Amended Complaint must be complete in itself without  
10 reference to the superseded pleading. *See S.D. Cal. Civ. L. R. 15.1.* Defendants not named and all  
11 claims not re-alleged in the Amended Complaint will be deemed to have been waived. *See King v.*  
12 *Atiyeh*, 814 F.2d 565, 567 (9th Cir. 1987). Further, if Plaintiff's Amended Complaint fails to state a  
13 claim upon which relief may be granted, it may be dismissed without further leave to amend and  
14 may hereafter be counted as a "strike" under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). *See McHenry v. Renne*, 84 F.3d  
15 1172, 1177-79 (9th Cir. 1996).

16 **IT IS SO ORDERED.**

17  
18 DATED: February 5, 2010

  
19 Hon. Jeffrey T. Miller  
20 United States District Judge

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